

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on an issue of national importance that has been ignored by this Congress. Schools across the Nation are bulging at the seams and the Department of Education predicts that overcrowding of America's schools will only worsen over the next decade. Yet school construction was not a part of our budget agreement and it has not been a part of the debate on this floor.

The Secretary of Education recently released a Baby Boom Echo report citing that kindergarten through 12th grade enrollments will be at an all-time high of 53 million this fall. By the year 2007, the number will reach over 54 million. How much longer can we ignore the problem of school overcrowding?

In my county, Orange County, we have one of the youngest populations in the Nation and Orange County schools are perfect examples of how overcrowding can create problems for schools and students across the Nation.

Schools in my congressional district have one of the highest growth rates in the Nation, between 2.4 percent and 5 percent per year.

Each time that I go home to my district, I visit one of those schools. During many of these visits, I have witnessed high schools and junior high classrooms where 50 or 60 or 65 students are crammed into one classroom. I have seen two classes being taught in one room. I have seen too many schools who use portable and temporary structures because they cannot afford to build new ones.

Our kids are not getting the attention they need and their learning is being inhibited. In addition, schools are quickly deteriorating because of extended and increased use.

Local school districts and States have obviously been unable to address school construction needs and, unfortunately, we have not given them an incentive to do so from the Federal level. That is why I have introduced the Expand and Rebuild America's Schools Act, which is a bill that will assist our local education agencies with the financing of school construction bonds.

The Expand and Rebuild America's Schools Act offers a 2-year pilot bond program that local school districts can take advantage of when financing school construction needs. The bonds are interest free. Because the Federal Government will provide a tax credit to lenders in the amount of the interest that would otherwise be paid.

But more importantly, this bill will reward schools that have high standards and that continue to succeed amidst bad conditions.

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This bond program will help those schools that have severe overcrowding problems, illustrated by year-round schedules and the use of these portable classrooms. Qualifying criteria for the program includes high growth rates and high student-teacher ratios.

Finally, this bill allows schools to apply for the program directly through the Department of Education, avoiding any State bureaucracy in funding decisions or program administration.

I hope this Congress will soon realize the importance of education, of our schools, and of our children. Let us make school construction and this bill a priority for our legislative agendas.

PUT EDUCATIONAL DOLLARS IN THE CLASSROOMS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. KINGSTON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, why are the liberal Washingtonian Democrats so afraid to change public education? Why are they trying to maintain the status quo in public education? What is it that they were afraid of? Are they so in the pockets of the Washington big unions that they are willing to sacrifice America's children to educational mediocrity?

I am a graduate of public schools. I am the son of a teacher and the brother of a teacher. I think it is very important for us to have a strong, dynamic public education system, and that is why I have worked with our conference to try to give public education the schools that they need to prepare our children for the future.

I am appalled by Members of Congress who choose to ignore the global realities of a changing world in order to keep the status quo. Just because Washington bureaucrats do not want to change or improve education does not mean that Congress has to be their lap dog.

Since I graduated from high school in 1973, SAT scores have fallen. On an international basis, American children, compared to Japanese, German and British children, score lower on many of the standardized tests. Public schools are losing students to private schools and religious schools, and home schools are increasing in popularity and numbers.

Public schools, because of this Washington command and control approach, have lost their local flexibility, their local control. They are mired in paperwork and red tape. That is why charter schools have become so popular.

What are charter schools? Charter schools are public schools. They are funded by public tax dollars. But unlike a regular, normal school, a charter school is free of the educational restrictions that the bureaucracy puts on them out of Washington and out of the State capital school boards.

They are so popular that in 1992 there was one charter school in the United States of America. Today there are 1,000, and within the next 3 years there should be another 2,000 to 3,000 charter schools. Again, why are they so popular? Because they have local control.

What is it that teachers and educators are so sick of? I will give my

colleagues an example. A teacher in Camden County in my district was telling me she just returned from a seminar on child sensitivity where they told her, at great expense to the taxpayers, not to hug children, not to be in a room alone with a child, and never to touch a child. And she works in an area where there are lots of broken homes and lots of kids who, Mr. Speaker, frankly, need a hug more than they need an A or an A+. They need a little loving, but we are paying teachers to learn how not to hug children.

Or the teacher in Darien, Georgia, who told me she has to spend 2 to 3 hours each and every week filling out paperwork for the bureaucrats in Atlanta who must send it to their bureaucrat bosses in Washington, D.C., 2 to 3 hours a week, which could be spent helping that marginal student catch up on the algebra or on the chemistry or on the social studies. But it is gone.

Or the mother in Savannah, Georgia, who tells me she no longer goes to PTA meetings because if she comes up with ideas, the teacher may agree or disagree with her, but it does not matter because they cannot change a thing because the teachers' hands have been tied by the bureaucrats, and the bureaucrats' hands at the school board have been tied by the Washington bureaucrats.

People want to return to local control in education. Our schools back home want to be free of Washington command and control bureaucracy, Mr. Speaker, and that is why it is so important that we, as a Congress, keep pushing for local control of education, we keep pushing for flexibility in the classroom, and we keep pushing to put educational dollars in the classroom with the teacher and the student and not the bureaucratic brokers in Washington and the State capitals.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time with a final word; that our public education system is well worth fighting for. Again, I am a graduate of public schools. I believe in them. But I believe we have to allow them the flexibility to be the great institutions which they once were.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. FATTAH] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. FATTAH addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Virginia [Mr. SCOTT] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. SCOTT addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Tennessee [Mr. FORD] is recognized for 5 minutes.